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178-73

13 September 1973

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Memorandum on Post-Ceasefire
North Vietnamese Construction Activity

1. Attached is a note on the above subject prepared for you by OER at my request. Its object is to summarize available evidence on North Vietnamese activity in developing a logistic infrastructure to support Communist activities in South Vietnam, i. e., road building on both sides of the Lao border (or, more precisely, both slopes of the Annamite range) and airfield construction or improvement activity. We have attempted to pull the facts together in brief compass for your use as a crib sheet, backup paper, or even supplementary briefing if you are asked a lot of questions on these subjects.

2. You will note that OER tries to put the airfield question in perspective and, in doing so, places it in a much lower key than the GVN's recent protests do. There are indeed twelve strips of varying capability now in Communist hands in South Vietnam. Hence, the Communists have an air operations capability in the South which they did not have prior to the ceasefire. OER's point, however, is that the only strip in South Vietnam in whose improvement the North Vietnamese seem to be investing any substantial effort is the one at Khe Sanh.

3. I have sent a copy of the attached to [] for editing and inclusion in your backup book. Should you want any additional material incorporated or any of its points treated in greater detail, please let me know.

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[]
George A. Carver, Jr.

Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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Attachment

Orig - DCI

1 - [] Approved For Release 2004/06/14 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000800120016-0

1 - Memos to and from DCF

1 - CAC Chrono

1 - VAS/RAC

1 - VAS Chrono

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Post-Ceasefire North Vietnamese Construction Activity

A. Road Construction

1. Soon after the 27 January Vietnam ceasefire the North Vietnamese embarked on an ambitious construction program to upgrade their road transport systems in Communist controlled areas of South Vietnam and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail through southern Laos. This effort included the expansion and improvement of existing roads as well as the construction of new ones. The major focus of the new improvement campaign is the construction of two lengthy, dual lane, all weather road systems extending from the DRV border southward along either side of the Annam Mountain Range which forms the border between southern Laos and South Vietnam.

2. Of the two systems, the Route 14 complex, which runs north-south through western South Vietnam, is of foremost importance to the Communists. This route eventually will extend from the DMZ into northern Tay Ninh Province, the location of COSVN Headquarters -- a distance of about 350-400 miles. For the first time, the Communists will then be able to transport troops and

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supplies from North Vietnam to major military commands in the south on roads located entirely within South Vietnam. From an engineering standpoint, the finished dual lane road will differ significantly from any previous "out-of-country" road built by North Vietnamese engineers. It will have a much straighter alignment, mostly through open terrain, widths of up to 45 feet to permit two-way traffic, culverts in place of ford crossings and drainage ditches on either shoulder to reduce washouts. The finished roadbed is expected to be covered with oil or asphalt which is also a major departure from past practice.

3. The northern 150 to 200 miles of Route 14 are already open and heavily traveled to points south of A Shau Valley. As of 31 July, a gap of only 30 miles separated this northern section from the southern construction alignment extending through western Kontum and Pleiku into Darlac Province. The southern half of Route 14 is still in the initial stages of construction, with intermittent dual lane construction noted as far south as central Darlac Province.

4. The new Route 14 corridor also forms the trunk of an extensive series of feeder roads newly built or improved since the ceasefire. These generally spread eastward

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bases, and several provide access into the populated coastal lowlands of GVN MRs 1 and 2. For example, a new road extending over 100 miles has been built from Route 14 on the Laos border eastward across the width of GVN MR-2 to within 15 miles of the coast in the vicinity of Sa Huynh. Altogether, some 300 miles of lateral routes have been identified [redacted] and some reports indicate an additional 100 to 200 miles of new roads are planned.

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5. In concert with the construction of Route 14 in South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese are readying a similar, dual lane, well-drained road system through the Laotian Panhandle. Recent aerial photography shows that construction is progressing at more than a dozen sites; as many as six bulldozers working on individual segments. Since June, some 75 miles of road have been graded in different areas, and construction since March now covers almost one-half of the 275-mile distance between entry points in North Vietnam and the route's probably terminus on the Cambodian border.

6. Although neither of the two new Communist north-south corridors are fully operational, the pace of construction should soon pickup with the arrival of the dry season. Both, however, should be ready to carry through

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traffic some time after the first of the year. Completion of the two systems will give the Communists much greater flexibility and mobility for deploying their military forces in southern Indochina. The roads will also add substantially to the excess capacity which the North Vietnamese have always maintained in their logistic operations. Road links will probably be developed between the two corridors, largely eliminating the seasonal "stop and go" pattern of transport caused by the shifting monsoon rains. No doubt Hanoi will justify both new routes in terms of peaceful economic development. It seems likely, however, that first priority will be given to improving and normalizing lines of communication among the major military strongholds, for ease of unit rotation or replacement of troops and equipment.

B. Airfield Construction

7. Since the Vietnam ceasefire a North Vietnamese airfield restoration program has not been implemented on a large scale. In fact, [] aside from the building of the new airfield at Khe Sanh -- a major effort -- and the construction and repair of three airstrips in northern Laos, the North Vietnamese have not

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made a concerted effort to construct new or refurbish existing airfields in South Vietnam. Aside from Khe Sanh, the only airfield related activity noted since the ceasefire has been at Loc Ninh and Dak To, but this activity is believed to be for resupply and rotation of ICCS inspection teams at these two locations. Nonetheless, there are a number of additional airfields under Communist control in South Vietnam which are serviceable, but were in that status at the time of the ceasefire.

8. North Vietnamese air activity also has been low keyed throughout the past-ceasefire period. Several VIP flights to Pathet Lao Headquarters in northern Laos have been noted, and Prince Sihanouk reportedly was flown from Hanoi into Khe Sanh on 23 March to begin his trip to rebel-held areas of Cambodia. More recently, [] has indicated that the North Vietnamese are planning to fly reconnaissance missions from Dong Hoi which reportedly will include target areas located in Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam and southern Laos.

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